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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

KINGSTON UPON THAMES,

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1786,

UPON THE DEATH OF

CAPTAIN RICHARD PEIRCE,

COMMANDER OF THE

HALSEWELL EAST-INDIA-MAN;

WHICH WAS LOST OFF THE ISLAND OF PURBECK, ON

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6, 1786.

BY THE REV. MATTHEW RAINE, A.M.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCLXXXVI.



*At a Court of Assembly of the Bailiffs and Freemen of the
Town of Kingston upon Thames, in the County of Surrey,
held at the Guild-Hall there, on Saturday the 25th day of
February, 1786,*

RESOLVED,

*That the Thanks of this Corporation be given to the
Reverend MATTHEW RAINE, Fellow of Trinity
College, Cambridge, for his Sermon on the Death of
Captain RICHARD PEIRCE, preached before them
at the Parish Church of Kingston upon Thames,
on Sunday the 19th instant; and that he be requested
to publish the same.*

CHAS^S JEMMETT,

Town Clerk.

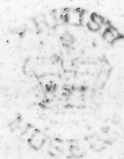


THE circumstance, which gave rise to the following Discourse, was the melancholy Death of Captain RICHARD PEIRCE, Commander of the *Halfewell East-Indiaman*. This ship, bound for Coast and Bay, sailed through the Downs on New-Year's Day, 1786. Besides the officers, the usual complement of seamen, and a body of soldiers for the Company's service, there were on-board, seven ladies and one gentleman, passengers. Among the ladies were two of the Captain's daughters, Miss Eliza and Miss Mary Anne Peirce.

On Tuesday the third of January, as they were bearing down Channel, it blew a very strong gale of wind, accompanied with a heavy fall of snow and sharp frost. During the two following days the storm continued without any considerable abatement of its violence; and on the morning of Friday the sixth, after combating with the tempest upwards of three days, every effort to save the ship proving ineffectual, she struck on the rocks off the
Island

Island of Purbeck, between Peverel Point and St. Alban's Head.

Of those on board, amounting nearly in the whole to two hundred in number, all except seventy-eight perished, either in the wreck, or in attempting to gain the land. Amongst the unhappy sufferers were the Captain, four of his Mates, and all the passengers. What renders this dreadful catastrophe more deplorable, is, that Captain PEIRCE, after all hopes of saving the ship and cargo were at an end, suffered his anxiety for the safety of the ladies to preponderate over every consideration for preserving his own life: and when it was found, that even for them nothing could be attempted with the least appearance of success, he chose rather to share in their fate, and die in the tender office of administering consolation to those, whom he could not save, than avail himself of that chance of escaping to shore, which, as it proved fortunate to many, might also have been the means of giving him back alive to his country, family, and friends.



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S E R M O N, &c.

ST. JAMES, C. IV. V. 14.—LATTER PART.

FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR THAT AP-
PEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN VANISHETH
AWAY.

IT is a singular circumstance, and one which strongly marks the inconsistency of human beings, that, whilst men, in all ages, and of every description, have confessed themselves conscious of the shortness of life, and the uncertain possession of its enjoyments, and have universally agreed in the necessity of providing against these inconveniences, so few have been found to live in a manner which corresponded with their conviction. The sensualist
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makes the brevity of life a reason for giving way to the constant indulgence of his appetites, and the gratification of his passions. The gloomy moralist, and superstitiously religious mind urge it as a pretext for retiring from all intercourse with the world. Persons engaged in the pursuit of riches and power adduce it as a cause for quickening their activity, and keeping alive their attention to their separate interests. Nor does it happen, that any of these, until alarmed by the attacks of sickness, or awakened by distress, begin to discover what an ill use they have made of their estimate; or to reflect how the short period and frailty of their existence might have been converted into a lesson of information, that would have taught them to meet pain with fortitude, and misfortune with resignation. Instead of which, involved in difficulties the unhappy sufferer broods with a melancholy uneasiness over his situation, gives an ideal magnitude to his own misery above that of any of his fellow creatures; and as he has hitherto scarcely ever given himself time to consider his dependence on a Superior Being, he now begins to question with bold impiety the equity of Providence in its dispensations to mankind. Thus are his
days

days passed in a devoted attention to the interests of this world, without so much as one reflection upon the possible existence of a future state: and at length the hour of dissolution arrives, when, if to reflect would avail any thing, neither opportunity nor inclination will long admit of it; and life is closed under dissatisfaction at what is past, and the terrors of uncertainty and apprehension of what is to come.--- This error, so general in the conduct of men, St. James seems to have particularly noticed; and accordingly, in the verse preceding that, from which I have read to you the words of my text, expostulates warmly with those, who give themselves up to such an interested pursuit after the things of this world, as is not only inconsistent with a short and fluctuating existence, but incompatible with the reverence and submission due to the Supreme Disposer of events. *Go to now, says the Apostle, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas, ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what, adds he, is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

Now, as it appears that we hold our being by so precarious a tenure, and since we see that we are by *Nature* exposed to many ills, by *situation* to many more, it may be matter of some consequence to enquire, by what means this tenure may be rendered more secure, and how these ills may be best averted: if not averted, how the mind may be instructed to bear them with becoming resignation, and patient submission. But I would first observe, that we ought carefully to distinguish between patience and cowardice, between submission and indolence. "We are not to repine, but we may lawfully struggle: for the calamities of life, like the necessities of nature, are calls to labour and exercises of diligence. When we feel any pressure of distress, we are not to conclude that we can only obey the will of Heaven by languishing under it, any more than when we perceive the pain of thirst, we are to imagine that water is prohibited."*

It is proposed then to enquire into the best method of alleviating the ills and miseries of human life.--- And this, perhaps, will be most easily accomplished by first examining the nature of these ills, and the sources from which they spring.

Of

* Rambler.

Of the calamities then, to which men are subject, besides the irreverfible fentence of death, (if indeed that may be called a calamity) fome may be faid to belong to, or to proceed from the conftitution and nature; and may be termed natural evils: others, as they depend upon external caufes, we fhall call contingent, or accidental. Evils of the former fort are fuch as affect the body with ficknefs, and originate either from difeafes fown in the conftitution, and inherent in our nature, or fuch as proceed from the inordinate gratification of the paffions. For each of thefe there is a feparate remedy. The penetration of human wifdom has long been employed in refearches, which have happily been attended with fuch a degree of fuccefs, that the pain of difeafe may be generally mitigated, and frequently removed; and if life cannot always be preferved, nor health always perfectly reftored, yet it is found that the lamp may be long kept alive, though it cannot be made to fhine with its accuftomed cheerfulness and fplendour. The diforders, that take their rife from the paffions, are the diforders of Nature indeed; but it fhould be remembered, that fhe has beftowed upon man, along with the paffions, the fublime faculty of Reafon, whole

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province is to circumscribe their limits, and to direct them to their proper application and use.

If this excellent gift be despised, if its power be not sufficiently called forth, the man, who suffers from such neglect or abuse of it, seems to merit the misfortune which he courts, and the distress which he was enabled, but had not the resolution nor inclination, to prevent.

But of all the multiplied miseries and ills, with which human life abounds, and to which it is constantly exposed, those are most to be dreaded, and seem to bear hardest upon the infirmity of our being, which, resulting from causes independent on, and unconnected with ourselves, it is not in the prudence of man to foresee or avert. Afflictions of this kind are attendant upon, and vary with all situations of life: but such is always their nature, that they call aloud for our consolation, and demand our tenderest compassion, with every other effort for their relief. Let us suppose, for a moment, a man engaged in some honest and laudable pursuit, by the success or miscarriage of which his family and himself are to be rendered
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happy and respectable, or to be sunk at once in wretchedness and distress. We see him then, with an eager and fond desire to accomplish his wishes, hazarding his all upon a single venture. Appearances favour him, and flattering expectation prompts him to the enterprize. But how often have we the mortification to observe such schemes frustrated by the secret contrivance of enemies, or the treachery of friends, all fond hopes of success blasted by disappointment, and his fortunes ruined by some sudden and unlooked-for loss.

But the loss, it will be said, which diminishes fortune, may be repaired by industry. Let us then carry the matter a little further, and view misfortune more general in its circumstances and effects. Let us conceive for a while, instead of one individual, or one family, a number of persons, on whom many families are dependent for support, employed together in extending the commercial intercourse, and promoting the commercial prosperity of their country: that *they go down to the sea, in ships*, as the Psalmist expresses himself, and that *their business is in the great waters*. The day of their departure is arrived; joyful expectation dis-

pels every idea of danger; the hope of returning to their native land, enriched with merchandize, and of communicating the comforts of an easy subsistence to those, for whom they brave the perils of the sea, predominates over the anxiety of separation. They set sail under the kind auspices of the winds; and every thing around them seems to encourage confidence, and insure success. But mark the sudden change of the scene---Scarcely does the shore, which they have left, retire from their sight, when the face of the sky is darkened, the stormy winds arise, and all the fury of the tempest rages upon the bosom of the deep. *They mount up to the heaven---they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted, because of trouble.* It is in vain to combat with the waves; the skill of the mariner is baffled, and every effort for safety proves an additional motive of alarm: till at length, unable to struggle with the force of combined elements, they give themselves a prey to their rage, and sink overwhelmed in the mighty waters. Where is now, alas! the joy that sparkled in the eye of hope? Where are now the schemes of happiness that agitated the bosom of affection? *They are gone even as the vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

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And here we cannot but recollect a melancholy event, attended with the most distressing circumstances; which has been of late a subject of so general sorrow: the effects of which, it is feared, will be long and severely felt by those, who were immediately connected with the sufferers in the dreadful catastrophe.

It would be painful in the extreme to dwell long upon the lamentable particulars of this very deplorable calamity. In whatever point of view we place the gloomy picture, the contemplation of it fills the mind with a mournful horror. Whether we turn our attention to the deceased, or to those whom they have left to bewail their untimely loss, we are presented alternately with objects that excite our regret and awaken our compassion. But we cannot omit the mention of one, who, from the peculiar relation in which he stood to you, when living, and from the singularly unhappy circumstances which accompanied him in his death, has engaged your particular attention and concern: and, indeed, if ever there was a man to whose memory a marked respect was due, to such respect his memory seems fairly entitled. It is not to his professional abilities, though

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the privation of them is felt and regreted by all such as knew properly to estimate their value; but it is to the virtues, which distinguished him as a Man and a Christian, that this tribute of regard is paid. The affection with which he discharged the several duties of domestic life, the ready bounty with which he assisted necessity, and the honest warmth by which he shewed the sincerity of his friendship, were all virtues so eminently conspicuous in him, that we cannot wonder they should have gained him universal admiration and esteem. But what principally recommends his memory to us here, and what he must undoubtedly have found to be his greatest consolation under the calamity which befel him, is the strict veneration with which he uniformly regarded the precepts of the Christian Religion, and the constant piety with which he signalized and adorned the practice of it. He neither suffered the interesting avocations of fortune, nor the cares of an active and perilous employment so far to engross his attention, as to make him forgetful of that Being, from whom flow all the blessings and benefits of life, and in whose hands are riches and poverty, honour and disgrace, pleasure and pain, and life and death.

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But why should I insist so much upon the virtues of a character before you, who were so well acquainted with its excellence? You had frequent opportunities to contemplate his good qualities, by having them presented to your observation in his own personal example. You saw, and you admired them. If they were worthy to be admired, let them be deemed worthy of imitation: so shall you erect to him a living monument, which, whilst it continues his memory down to your posterity, shall instruct and edify them; which, whilst it records his virtues, shall speak your praise. But it is unnecessary to urge further what your own inclinations must already have anticipated.

Now, when we reflect upon the various interruptions which check us in our pursuits, and the sudden misfortunes which are constantly ready to disturb us in, or to hurry us away from the enjoyment of our worldly acquisitions: above all, when we see these general reflections so fully exemplified by the melancholy instance presented immediately to our view, we cannot but be seriously alarmed for ourselves, and begin to think, if we have hitherto neg-

lected it, of making salutary provision against the hour of danger.

And this leads me to the consideration of that part of my subject, in which it was observed, that those misfortunes seemed to bear hardest upon our nature, which arise from external causes; as we cannot prevent, and frequently not remove them. It was proposed, however, to enquire what would be the best alleviation of them; and how a state of mind was to be acquired, best prepared to meet such incidental trials of affliction.

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Death in ~~its~~ most ordinary appearance is thought to be sufficiently terrible; and however slow his approaches, they are not beheld, even at a distance, without apprehension and dread. But when he comes armed with additional terrors to deal sudden destruction around him, what, at that tremendous hour, shall administer consolation, and add fortitude to the mind? What, but the consciousness of a life passed in conformity to the dictates of Reason and Religion? Every man is ready and desirous of preparing himself to resist or keep aloof the common evils of life.

Is it then that death, the most certain of all evils, is a matter of less moment than the common occurrences of life, that we see so little inclination in men to prepare to meet it? Are the consequences of eternity so trifling, that they are to be neglected for the short enjoyments of a temporary existence? *Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God!*

I have already remarked, that it was the praise of him whom we this day commemorate in our sorrows, that he possessed a mind, fitted by religious cultivation, to meet death undismayed; and surely this must be matter of unspeakable consolation to those who are most nearly concerned for his loss, when they reflect, that although he be gone from them, he is gone to receive that comfortable salutation in Heaven—*Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!*

It was the advice of a wise heathen to his friend, that he should live as if every instant of his life were to be the last. If such was the exhortation, for disarming death of its terrors, to one, who had nothing certain to hope for, nothing certain to fear beyond the present life; but whose views of a
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future state of happiness and misery were at best but confused and very imperfect; how much more momentous, how much more applicable will the counsel appear to be to those, who have received from the mouth of a blessed Redeemer the important doctrine of a resurrection from the grave, and the no less important message of a future state of rewards and corrections; and who are to consider death not as the end of being, but as the beginning of immortality! It will be asked then perhaps, How shall a man attain that happy state of mind which will enable him to smile at the sudden approach of death, and to meet the stroke with cheerfulness and resignation? The advice of living always, as if always on the point of death, will be the properest answer: if we consider, that in a Christian notion this is to live with a due sense of the obligations of religion constantly impressed upon the mind; and to bear in remembrance, that the greatest recommendation to the rewards of eternity, is to study to deserve them.

Nor will this sense of religion be useful only for arming the soul against the attack of death, it will instruct

struct us also to bear the lesser ills of life, with a proper acquiescence in them, as the dispensations of Providence; and prevent us from the impiety of murmuring and complaint. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the Name of the Lord!* was the sentiment of Job, when informed of the concurrence of misfortunes, which had deprived him of his family and all his possessions. Although it does not generally fall to the lot of humanity to be endowed with that patient fortitude and pious resignation, which mark the character of this righteous person, yet neither are men in general subjects of so great affliction. But be the sufferings of men howsoever severe, much may be done, if attempted, towards attaining such a disposition as shall hinder us from repining at the distributions of him, who is said *to chasten those whom he loveth, and to receive every son whom he scourgeth,*

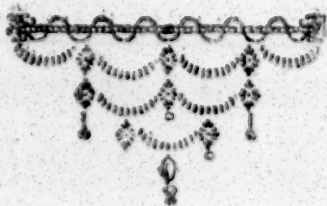
To conclude. Seeing that man is born to trouble, that he is constantly encompassed with misfortunes, that the frailty of life forbids him to trust with confidence in the strength of others, or repose with security in his own; and seeing that human infirmity is unable to bear with calmness the ills which it is

doomed to suffer ; how necessary is it that we make such useful provision as will administer succour and relieve our distress in the needful time of trouble ! Since it appears, moreover, that there is no situation sufficiently fortified to resist the great enemy of mankind ; as we are liable to be surprized by him, when we least expect it, (for in the midst of life we are in death) and further, as we must all be summoned to that great and general judgment, where a strict and impartial account will be taken of our actions, and where even our most secret thoughts must undergo a thorough and minute investigation, how requisite is it, that we be prepared to answer with a well grounded confidence at that awful hour !

For these purposes be the duties of religion our first, as they certainly are our nearest concern. We shall find, by constantly and uniformly exercising ourselves in the practice of them, that the mind will be gradually trained to that pious firmness, which is necessary to support it under misfortune, and to enable it to resist despair. At the same time, it will be tempered with that humility, which, in the height of riches, prosperity, and power, represses the arrogance

gance of presumption, and the selfish insolence of pride. Thus shall we be led on to consider properly our dependence upon him, by whom we live, move, and have our being: and to acknowledge that whatsoever befalls us in this life, as it may be referable to his all-directing providence, is designed to be productive of our immediate improvement, and conducive to our future happiness. Aided by such reflections as these, and supported by a conscious integrity in the faithful discharge of our duty, we shall meet calamity without alarm, and encounter death himself with steadiness. We shall consider our dissolution as a release from the troubles and anxieties of this world, and as the means of our admission to a participation of the joys and glory of the next.

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Nov. 27.

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